

ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

A multi-component icon and system and method of generating thereof. The multi-component icon is generated from characteristics of a data object or data objects where the characteristics include data object content and data object metadata. The multi-component icon includes a plurality of visual traits. Each visual trait has a plurality of variations, such as different shapes, colors, and/or patterns. The visual traits are variably assignable to any one characteristic of the data object such that each variation of the characteristic is visually represented by the icon by a corresponding variation of the variably assignable visual trait. Multi-component icons are generated for groups of data objects, such as word processing files, by determining common characteristics between the files, assigning visual traits to the common characteristics, and then displaying the multi-component icons according to the assignments such that variations of the common characteristic between the files are symbolically show by variations of the assigned visual trait. Icon visual traits are interactive so as to indicate relationships between data object characteristics by "dragging" one icon over another.